

givers, in consultation with healthcare professionals, can then make the best informed decisions.

Guidelines for liberalised direct to consumer information

Information from the pharmaceutical industry must meet all applicable standards for balance and accuracy—but so should other sources of information. Industry advertising is already controlled through legal or regulatory agency initiatives. Other sources of direct to consumer product information from industry should be evidence based, fairly presented, and easily understood. Some new internet guidelines developed by the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations are designed to ensure that consumers receive properly vetted information from the industry.¹⁹ The internet is already a wide open marketplace of information, and European regulators cannot turn back the tide. But guidelines like these, which are consistent with the European Commission's *Health Online* set of quality criteria for health websites, will help to protect the interests of European citizens.²⁰

Finally, conditions that might seem part of the normal vicissitudes of life to some, can be worrisome to others. And, as indicated above, a strong case can be made for liberalised direct to consumer information on seriously undertreated and undiagnosed diseases. To limit access to product information arbitrarily because of unfounded fears about direct to consumer advertising impinges on the rights of Europeans to have all the information they need to make informed choices about their health.—Silvia N Bonaccorso, Jeffrey L Sturchio

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Endpiece

More on music

The more captive our delight, the more insistent our need of and "answering to" a piece of music, the more inaccessible are the reasons why. It is a platitude to observe that music shares with love and with death the mystery of the self-evident. This triad is a cliché, of which composers and writers on music have availed themselves prodigally. But it may be a cliché of essential suggestion.

George Steiner. *Errata: an examined life*. London: Phoenix, 1998:75-6

Submitted by Iona Heath, general practitioner, London

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